

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

May 2023 Newsletter

From the Secretary

This time last year I reported that nothing in my garden had been affected by the weather. Not so this last winter, as I lost a couple of hebes that I had thought were sufficiently well established to withstand the frost and freezing winds. Several people I have spoken to also lost plants, but the spring flowers are doing well. My main problem is the pigeons that peck the petals and nip the buds off various plants, plus of course also the snails that nibble the primulas in the tubs, I found them hiding under the leaves.

The AGA holiday to the Isle of Wight was enjoyed by the participants and a report and photos appear later in this Newsletter.

Talks and trips are organized for the rest of the year and the committee hope many members will participate in these. Meanwhile we wish you all a very successful gardening year.

Jean Bowling

From the Treasurer – refunds for booked outings

If you have booked an outing and then have to cancel for any reason, we cannot usually refund the full amount paid because the cost of coach hire is fixed and has already been paid and the appropriate amount added to the cost of each ticket. Normally, we only pay the entry fees to the gardens visited on arrival, and so pay only for the number of people who actually attend. In this case we can refund the unpaid garden entrance fee (and for any included refreshments) if you have to cancel. However, there has been an increasing problem

in the last few years in restaurants, etc, of “no-shows” – people who make a reservation but then do not turn up. Some restaurants now charge a deposit on booking, and now some of the gardens we visit are demanding either a deposit or the total entry fee in advance. When this is the case, I am afraid we cannot refund the money for entry fees already paid, unless, as is extremely unlikely, the garden gives us a refund. If you do not already have year-round travel insurance, it may be worth considering it.

Plant sale, April 29th

Many thanks to those who turned up to help set up, sell plants, talk to visitors and clear away at the end, as well as those who donated plants. Overall, we made a profit of £626, and at least two new members joined on the day. A useful addition to our funds, but more importantly, well worth our time to raise our profile in the area and attract new members.



Harbingers of spring

It had never occurred to me to wonder why early spring flowers are mainly yellow or white, until an article in the spring issue of the Chiltern Society magazine (Chiltern 247, 30-33, 2023) suggested that these early flowers rely mainly on (colour blind) flies for pollination, and yellow and white flowers will be the most visible. Apart from a few species, it seems that flies are short-sighted, and cannot even distinguish between yellow and white; they just see a bright source of nectar and pollen. This is a nice example of evolution. Plants with early flowers that are not visible to early pollinators are not pollinated, and so die out, while those that are yellow or white are pollinated, and so survive.

The article goes on to tell us that cowslips are also known as cow-slops or cow pats, because their

favoured habitat is cattle-grazed meadows – we should therefore be more than grateful for the self-seeded clumps in our garden, where we have the occasional deer, but fortunately no grazing cows.

We are also told that despite writing about “*a crowd, a host of golden daffodils*”, Wordsworth’s favourite flower, about which he wrote three poems, was the lesser celandine “*There’s a flower that shall be mine, ‘tis the little celandine*”. He would delight in our garden in early spring where there are large areas of lesser celandine. We have learnt over the years that it best to leave them to die down on their own – hoeing them up when green just breaks up roots that spread them even further; they are probably the easiest of plants to propagate from (inadvertent) root cuttings.



cowslip



lesser celandine



winter aconites and snowdrops



The bulbs (left) were labelled as “mini daffodils”, but for one to flower at only a couple of inches tall really was taking things a bit far.

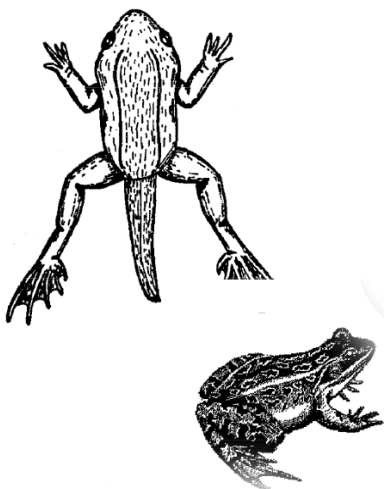
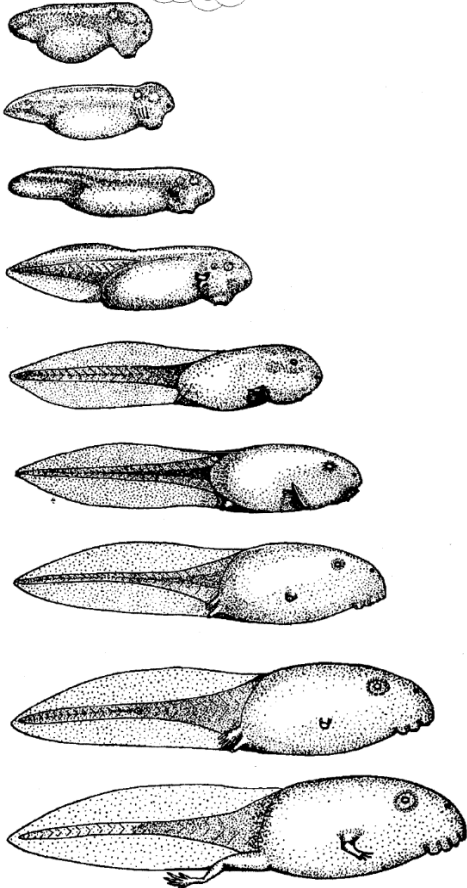
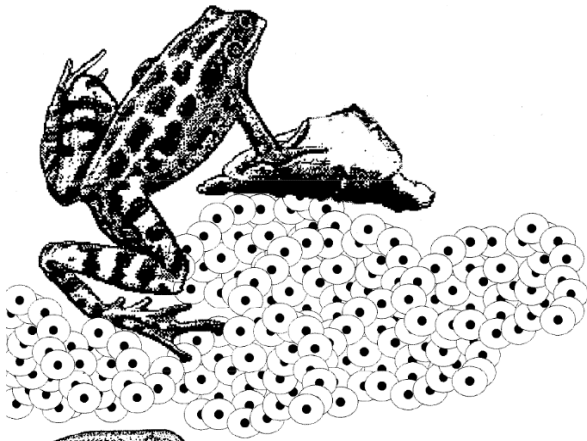
We had almost given up on this amaryllis (right) that we bought in December; it had been cut off too near the bulb to have any leaves, and until mid-February showed no signs of growth at all. Then it surprised us with a flower spike with just two blooms. Then a second spike appeared, and we came home from holiday in April to see this had three blooms.



Our squirrel-proof bird feeder isn't!

At least one of “our” squirrels has learnt how to get inside the cage for peanuts, but then for quite a while it struggled to get out again until it learnt to swing the whole thing, grab the post with its forepaws, and press the nut-holder with its hind paws at the same time. We did wonder if it ate too many nuts it would be trapped until it lost weight!





Spring

Spring is when all the sheep have their lambs, all the hens have their chicks and all the teachers have their tadpoles.

Anon pupil
North Ealing Primary School, 1950s

Alas, we seem to have no frogspawn at all in our pond this year, unless it was laid earlier than the usual 2nd – 3rd week in March and had all been eaten by the fish by the time we returned from a month away.

A far cry from the small shallow pond in our previous garden, which was overlooked by the neighbour's impressionable young daughter; late March could best be described as frogs' porn, with a dozen or more couples writhing in apparent mating ecstasy.

Lost in translation

On a visit to a botanic gardens in Germany, my companion, who does not speak German, saw the area labelled *gift pflanze*, (*poisonous plants*) which was home to some not very attractive specimens, and commented "I would not want them as a gift".

Quite unrelated to gardens, but a similar oddity of translation. The first stop on our Rhine cruise last year was in Trier. After showing us around, our (German) guide left us to our own devices for a while, telling us where to meet up to go back to the coach. When we arrived he told us "You must not wait here, go to the coach". Thinking about it later, in German he would have said "Es braught nicht hier zu warten" – meaning "it is not necessary to wait here, you may go back to the coach".

For the football World Cup in 1966, when Germany played some games in Birmingham, the tourist authorities produced a booklet German fans about the many *kleinen Orte* around Birmingham that could be visited on full or half day excursions by Midland Red bus. Unfortunately, while *kleinen Orte* does mean *small places*, it is also a colloquialism for public convenience.

Forthcoming meetings in the Drake Hall

A plea for help

A small group of reliable regulars arrive at the Drake Hall about 7pm to put out chairs and tables, then meet and greet members and guests outside the hall from about 7:30. It would be more than just nice to have a

few more people to help with setting up the hall and clearing away after the meeting – contrary to what seems to be popular belief, these tasks are not done by “house elves”.

May 25th John Tyler – the changing wildlife of the Chilterns

From warm seas, through Ice Ages, tundra and forest to the farmland and beechwoods of today, we travel through a hundred million years to follow the story of the Chiltern landscape and its wildlife.

<https://johntyler.co.uk/bio.htm>

John has always been fascinated by wildlife. Having studied Zoology and Conservation at university, he worked with the Ecological Parks Trust (now the Trust for Urban Ecology), creating and managing urban nature reserves so that children could learn about nature at first hand. Their first site was built from scratch on a former lorry park at the foot of Tower Bridge in the heart of London, where visitors could explore a pond, a meadow or even a sand dune within sight of St. Paul's cathedral.



After a four year stint in London he spent the next 22 years as the warden of the Sevenoaks Reserve in Kent, a string of flooded gravel pit lakes fringed by woodland and managed by a small independent charity. Here he was given a more or less free hand to develop the reserve, from the initial surveys of plants, fungi and animals, through drawing up a management plan, to the nitty-gritty of digging ponds, building islands, laying out a nature trail and guiding school groups.

All this was achieved with a small staff, minimal bureaucracy and a large gang of dedicated volunteers.

This immensely rewarding and enjoyable situation came to an abrupt halt in 2005 when the reserve was taken over by the Kent Wildlife Trust, so it seemed like an ideal time to move on to something new. Since then John has been based in Buckinghamshire, giving talks on a range of natural history topics and leading guided walks.

June 22nd Andy McIndoe – Shrubs: discover the perfect plant for every place in your garden



How to make the best possible choice when looking for a shrub for particular growing conditions, or for a specific quality. Whether you are looking for something for a shady spot, narrow border or simply the one with the most fragrant flowers, this lecture will inspire you.

<http://www.andymcindoe.com/>

With over 40 years of experience in retail and production horticulture, Andy McIndoe is an author and regular contributor to a number of magazines, blogs and BBC Radio. He lectures to gardening groups and societies at home and abroad, leads gardening tours and is consultant to well-known suppliers in the garden industry.

Andy works freelance, spending most of his time advising on, designing and planting, private gardens of all sizes. His plant knowledge, practical approach and eye for planting combinations are put to good use both in creating gardens from scratch and transforming

established gardens. He and his wife Ros welcome visitors by appointment to their 2.5 acre naturalistic garden, Sandhill Farm, Hampshire during the spring, summer and autumn.

During his long career with Hillier Nurseries he was responsible for the development of the company's chain of garden centres and for 25 consecutive Gold Medal winning exhibits at RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Andy was awarded the prestigious Veitch Memorial Medal (one of the highest accolades in the world of horticulture) by the Royal Horticultural Society in 2017 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the science and practice of horticulture.

July 27th Dr Stephen Head – Wildlife gardening, myths and realities

Dr Stephen Head studied Zoology and Geology at Cambridge University, and went on to complete a PhD on Red Sea coral reef ecology. He taught zoology, marine science, ecology and physiology at Oxford University, the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, and Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, where he became Assistant Dean of Science. Returning to the UK, he worked as CEO in two large conservation charities, and served as a trustee for several others. For 8 years he was a Secretary of State appointed member of the Exmoor National Park Authority, where he led on biodiversity and landscape.



An enthusiastic, if iconoclastic, gardener, he feels strongly that in a densely packed nation, our gardens are an exceptionally important conservation opportunity. He works closely with the RHS, writing for *The Garden* magazine, and lecturing at Wisley and Rosemoor. He chaired a group that won Gold and “Best in Show” for a garden at the 2010 Chelsea Flower Show.

(The story of this forms another of his fascinating lectures)

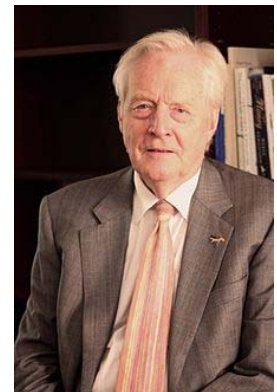
Steve has built up and runs the Wildlife Gardening Forum (<http://www.wlqf.org/>), a registered national charity which now has members from 225 environmental organisations. He has a wide knowledge of the world's natural history on land and underwater, and his experience of lecturing to academics, clubs and societies make his talks entertaining and stimulating as well as informative.

His hobbies and interests include adventurous cooking, and collecting Georgian glass, cartoons and natural history curiosities, including a stuffed South American rhea which guards the sitting room of his 17th century house.

We do not meet in August

September 28th Prof Sir Roderick Floud – Purchasing Paradise: the money that financed great gardens

Sir Roderick Floud, one of Britain's pre-eminent economic historians, tells us that gardens have been created in Britain since Roman times but that their true growth began in the seventeenth century; by the eighteenth century, nurseries in London took up 100 acres, with ten million plants that were worth more than all of the nurseries in France combined. His books *England's Magnificent Gardens* and *An Economic History of the English Garden* look at the history of England's magnificent gardens as a history of Britain itself, from the seventeenth-century gardens of Charles II to those of King Charles III today. His ground-breaking study of the history, money, places and personalities involved in British gardens over the past 350 years gives fascinating insight into why gardening is part of this country's soul.



Details of further meetings for this year will be in the November newsletter

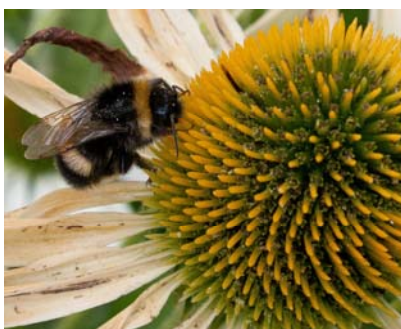
October 26th Dr Sandy Primrose – the language of flowers

November 23rd Meriet Duncan – Creating a buzz about the bees

By mistake the November meeting was omitted from the yellow printed programme card.

December 14th Xmas social

Note that this is the third Thursday of the month, not our usual fourth Thursday.



There was piece on BBC Radio 4 *Today* on April 18th about an Afghani violist that included him playing part of the Dean Martin 1960s hit *Sway*. The tune ear-wiggled me all day until I came up with this garden-related lyric:

When the winter coldness goes away
Plant for me, do not spray
Only you have that tragic technique
When you spray I grow weak.

Outings to book now

Evening visit to Jeanne and Michael Harrison's garden, Wednesday 12th July 18:00 – 20:00

Please send the attached booking form to Jeanne Harrison, 54 Longfield Drive, HP6 5HE, telephone 01494 723669
Soft and alcoholic drinks will be served.

The cost is £5 per person.

Please either:

enclose a cheque for £5 per person payable to Amersham Gardening Association

or make a bank transfer to Amersham Gardening Association,

TSB Bank, sort code 30 90 18, account number 01010715,

with the reference in the format J VH-BloggsJI where Bloggs is your surname and J your initial

Tea at Little Heath Nursery, Tuesday August 15th from 14:30

Little Heath Farm Nursery at Potten End near Berkhamsted, HP4 2RY

We have lost several nurseries so I think it important to support our local nurseries, so come and join us for afternoon tea at Little Heath Farm Nursery and tea room. Most of us will remember the talk last year by Vanessa Garstin, who described how they are renovating Little Heath Farm Nursery after the previous owners John and Jan Spokes retired in 2018. After the Spokes left, it quickly became overgrown, but with amazing energy Vanessa and her husband Jonathan have transformed it, with the help of John and Jan. They specialise in alpines, perennials and shrubs and I am told they will have plenty of drought tolerant plants for sale.

The well known tea room sells a wide range of savoury and sweet treats including of course cakes. If you would like a cream tea they would like to know in advance.

Please fill in the attached booking form. There is no charge for this visit, but the car park is quite small so I will arrange car shares where possible, and you will have to pay for your cream tea on the day.

Frances Billington

Coach trip to Kew Gardens, Tuesday 6th September, leaving Amersham Community Centre at 09:00

Kew is well worth visiting at any time of the year. When we visit in September the Great Broad Walk Borders should be at their late summer best and with autumn colour just beginning to show in many of the trees in the arboretum.

The iconic Palm House, the Princess of Wales Conservatory and the Waterlily House are well worth wandering through. Hopefully, Kew Palace will also be open then. Kew gardens are quite rightly a World Heritage Site and a leading scientific research centre.

Cafes and restaurants at Kew offer a wide variety of food and drink (at own expense) and picnics are allowed throughout the garden for those who wish to bring their own refreshments.

Please fill in the attached booking form and send it with a stamped addressed envelope to
Margaret Hillier, 9 Batchelors Way, Amrsham, HP7 9AQ

The cost is £32.50 per person

Please either:

enclose a cheque for £32.50 per person payable to Amersham Gardening Association

or make a bank transfer to Amersham Gardening Association,

TSB Bank, sort code 30 90 18, account number 01010715,

with the reference in the format Kew-BloggsJ where Bloggs is your surname and J your initial

Three outings that you do not need to book

Penn and Tylers Green open gardens, Sunday 11th June, from 13:30 - 17:30. 10 gardens will be open, plus church flower arrangements and refreshments. Tickets £5 from the village hall, Church Road, Penn.

Winchmore Hill open gardens and allotments, Saturday 17th June, from 12:00 – 17:00. Tickets/programmes from Winchmore Hill Memorial Hall, £5 per person.

Chiltern forage farm, Sunday 2nd July, tour at either 14:30 or 16:00. Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire HP27 0SU
<https://www.plunketgardens.com/country-gardens/chiltern-forage-farm/>

This is an open day for the National Gardens scheme; we joining as a group, but no need to book, just turn up and pay £4 in **cash**.

Outing to Englefield Gardens and Lower Bowden Manor 20th April 2023

We were lucky with the weather the day we visited the gardens. (Editor notes that the luck only held until we returned to Amersham, when the heavens opened.)

At Englefield we were greeted by the Events Manager, Peter Carson, and treated to coffee and cakes in the gallery of this Elizabethan House, once owned by Sir Francis Walsingham.

We were given a tour of the magnificent grounds accompanied by two of the four gardeners. The garden was mainly landscaped on two levels with many species of shrubs and mature trees.



For anyone interested in visiting, the gardens are open to the public every Monday, and are free to RHS and NGS members. (<https://www.Englefieldestate.co.uk/the-estate/gardens-woodlands/gardens>)



There was a bit of a disaster over the Cobb's Farm Shop lunch stop; Liz was not told there are two Cobb's farm shops a few miles apart, nor was she told which one she was talking to when she booked by phone).

After lunch we went to Lower Bowden Manor, where we were greeted by the owner, Robin Cox-Nicol and his head gardener.

Divided into two groups, we were given a tour of the various "rooms" in the garden, designed by Mrs Juliet Cox-Nicol, a garden designer. Juliet does not like colourful flower borders but prefers the garden to look good all year round, hence the wonderful selection of species shrubs and trees. It was an interesting garden to visit and provoked many a discussion.



Elizabeth Moulton

For David Bender's photos go to <https://www.flickr.com/photos/127260098@N04/albums/72177720307936558>

For Keith Hoffmeister's photos go to <https://youtu.be/sOWeMYOYSRg>



Visit to Stepping Stones Saturday 6th May.

After watching the coronation, the processions and the scenes from the balcony of Buckingham Palace it was good to look forward to a local garden visit. Despite the rain, Mike and Jean Timberlake welcomed us to their garden in South Heath. Due to the weather we were down in numbers but those who attended enjoyed the time we spent there seeing their lovely garden.

Since 1995 they have gradually created the garden, recently acquiring more land at the side of the house, which they have turned into a huge gravel garden with acers, containers of sempervivums, some climbers and a water feature.



There was so much of interest to see in the garden. Near to the entrance was a small judas tree in full bloom which was much admired. Trees and shrubs led us to a small vegetable patch with an old plough featured on a gravel bed. A summer house, pond and beds of spring flowers - bluebells, forget me knots, camasias and fritillaries led us through to the path to the rear of the house.



More sempervivums, acers, cloud trees and on to the working area of the garden where we found chickens, green houses - one devoted to succulents - and plants for sale. There was a good selection, all cultivated by Jean, with magnificent aeoniums that were also seen around the garden.



Wine and nibbles in the kitchen, with the resident tortoise fast asleep in his box, ended a most enjoyable visit. Mike and Jean thanked us for our generous donation to Rennie Grove Hospice.

If you missed seeing the garden it will be open again on June 4th from 12.00 - 5 pm for Rennie Grove Hospice Care, with cakes for sale. Donations of cakes would be gratefully received.

Irene Glyn-Jones



Isle of Wight holiday, May 15th – 19th

Apart from the last afternoon, we had perfectly dry and sunny weather all week. Perhaps surprisingly, very few plants were bought, unlike previous years when by the end of the holiday there were plants on any empty seats, down the steps to the side door, and anywhere we could put them.

This is because there were few plants offered for sale. Exbury had some splendid azaleas and rhododendrons, too large to fit in the coach and very expensive. Then no plants offered until Mottistone on Thursday (only a few, and nothing very exciting), and Furzey on Friday, where some people did buy a few plants.

Exbury, Monday



Our visit was at the perfect time of year to see the stunning azaleas and rhododendrons in full bloom. They are the garden's speciality, many bred there by the Rothschilds. There were bluebells under many of them as well. In the sundial garden the wisteria, which must be at least 100 years old, was also in splendid bloom.



Crab Cottage, Tuesday



The visit to Crab Cottage provided our exercise for the day; the cottage is several hundred yards uphill on what is mainly an unmade road / gravel track – no way could the coach have taken us there, so it was parked by the Church on the main road.



Crab Cottage has two gardens, one a croquet lawn and wild garden with a pond and a sea view, and the other, on the other side of the house, a more traditional family garden, that is more sheltered. So, the cottage has two gardens with two different micro-climates.



Northcourt Manor Gardens, Tuesday



The gardens in front of the house slope downwards to a chalk stream, with a footpath through an area of wild garlic to the road; again the coach had to park on the road and we walked up the relatively gentle slope to the house. We were told that on one side of the garden is chalk (hence the stream) and on the other is greensand, so there are both acid and alkaline soils, as well as wetlands around the stream, which had blue, yellow, pink and white camasias in flower. Behind the house there is a walled garden, then a series of terraces rising relatively steeply. Northcourt Manor offers bed and breakfast (there is access for cars) – something to consider if you are planning a holiday on the Island, and when we visited there was also an art class in progress.



Ventnor Botanical Gardens (or not), Wednesday

In somewhat of a departure from previous years, Wednesday was a “free” day. Some people took advantage of the coach to visit Osbourne House; some took advantage of a boat trip around the Island and over

to Portsmouth harbour; some took their chances with Island buses and went exploring on their own. A few of us hired a minibus and went to Ventnor Botanical Gardens.



Despite some dire warnings and bad reviews, the gardens were not in as bad a shape as we might have expected. There were indeed many areas in need of some serious weeding and cutting back of dead wood, and even some of last year's perennials, but overall it was a worthwhile visit. The echiums the garden is famous for were just coming into flower, and there were some splendid displays in the South African garden.

Although we were given wristbands when we paid our entry fee, these were not checked anywhere, and we found two places where you could enter the garden without showing them.



Farringford House and gardens, Thursday



In the 19th century, Farringford was the home of the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson, and remained in the family after his death in 1892, until 1945. It then became a hotel, with holiday chalets and car parking in what had been the walled garden. The hotel closed in 2009 and both the house and gardens have been restored to their original glory. After demolition of the holiday chalets and removal of the concrete, the walled garden has been restored – a process that involved the incorporation of many tons of cow manure to create a fertile soil. Apart from the walled garden, the remainder of the estate is open meadows, with some splendid trees, and views out over the downs.



Mottistone gardens, Thursday



The gardens at Mottistone are in two parts. The lower garden is to the right as you enter. Here there is an ingenious circular design – a clever way of creating a long border in a relatively small space – it curves round the area, with curved borders set in the grassland as well. On the other side of the house the gardens are arranged in a more traditional form, but in terraces because the ground rises quite steeply through a kitchen garden, formal borders and orchard.



Furzey gardens, Friday



Furzey gardens were first planted by the Dalrymple family in 1922, and they exchanged plants (especially rhododendrons and azaleas) with their neighbours in the New Forest, the Rothschilds. The gardens opened to the public in 1930, but after the war it was difficult to maintain them, and the estate was sold in 1972. It was bought by Tim Selwood, a local solicitor who set up a charitable trust with an intensive programme of planting and maintenance. In 1986 the Minstead Trust was established to manage the gardens as a source of employment and support for people with learning disabilities.

Gareth, our driver, had managed to book us on an earlier ferry than originally planned, so that we arrived at Furzey early, and had time to explore the gardens before lunch. This was indeed fortunate, as the weather broke after lunch, and it rained quite heavily.



...and so back to Amersham in the rain.

Thanks to Stuart, Felicity, Joan, Frances, Jane, Val, Isabel and Liz for their hard work in organising the trip and negotiating (sometimes with great difficulty) with the various gardens we visited. In at least two gardens, the people they had been liaising with about lunches ordered in advance were not there when we arrived, and no-one seemed to know what had been ordered! By contrast, at Crab Cottage we were greeted with

coffee and delicious cakes; at Northcourt Manor we were treated to a splendid buffet lunch. I especially enjoyed the flowers of chives and wild garlic in the salad – indeed, walking through the wild garlic along the path from the road to the house, the smell of the wild garlic left me almost desperate for a baguette and butter to make some garlic bread.

To see these photos, and others in this newsletter at full size, go to <https://www.flickr.com/photos/127260098@N04/albums/72177720308469395> Click the button on the top right of the screen for a slide show; you can scroll through the pictures using the > and < arrows on the right and left of the screen.



Wanted – a new membership secretary

Clive Symes has been our membership secretary for 17 years, and wishes to relinquish the post. It is not unduly onerous, with a burst of activity in November and December when renewals are due, then in January and February chasing up those who have not renewed.

Then it is just a matter of adding new members through the year – usually one or two a month. For more details, contact Clive (membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk)

Some requests for help

We always need people to meet and greet members and visitors at our meetings.

If you can help, please contact Felicity Vickery Tel: 01494 726284, email felicityvickery@yahoo.co.uk

We need people to help with the tea and coffee at our meetings. There is a rota so you are not expected to help at every meeting. If you can help, please contact Liz Moulton Tel: 01494 784913, email libbym6740@gmail.com

Please remember the raffle at each meeting. The profit on the raffles makes a very useful contribution to our expenses; subscriptions alone do not cover the cost of meetings and speakers.

Publicity. If you know where you could put a publicity poster please contact david.bender@btinternet.com

At present we have posters in the following places:

White Hill Centre, Chesham
Van Hage garden centre
Little Chalfont Library
Coleshill Village Hall

Committee and Contact Details

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Newsletter Editor	David Bender	newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk

Past newsletters

There is an archive of past newsletters from May 2014 to the current issue on our website at

<http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/newsletter.html>

Local events

If you know of local garden events, open gardens, etc, please email newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk to let us know as early as possible, so that information can go out in the newsletter and on the website.

Photos from outings

You can see links to lots of photos from our outings at <http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/outings.html>

New membership secretary wanted

Clive has been membership secretary for 17 years, and wishes to relinquish the post. It is not unduly onerous. There is a burst of activity in November and December when renewals are due, and members who have not renewed are chased up in January / February.

Thereafter it is a matter of adding new members as they join; usually 1 – 3 per month. There is a membership spreadsheet that is currently maintained by the treasurer. Contact Clive or David (email addresses above) for more information about what is involved.